

# **MENA Women's News Brief**

**May 5, 2015 – May 19, 2015**

## **May 13: Many Women In The Arab World Are Highly Educated, But Underemployed**

“Maysa Jalbout, a fellow at the Brookings Institution’s Center for Universal Education, calculated recently that across the Arab world, women slightly outnumber men in tertiary education, with a female-to-male enrollment ration of 108 percent. But, as Jalbout points out, ‘Three out of four Arab women remain outside the labor force’ — the lowest in the world. That’s true whether they’re college graduates or relatively uneducated.” ([OZY via the Huffington Post](#))

## **Egypt**

### **May 10: Egypt's Police Adopt New Strategy to Combat Violence Against Women**

“Egypt’s Ministry of Interior commenced on Sunday, May 10 a new national strategy aimed at combating violence against women on all levels. The police force’s new strategy includes an increase in the number of patrols for quick intervention and response to emergency calls regarding any violence against women. Moreover, more female physicians have been hired and new sections within police stations have been formed to receive victims of violence and assault.” ([Egyptian Streets](#))

### **May 12: 92 percent of married women in Egypt have undergone genital mutilation, survey finds**

“Roughly 92 percent of married women have undergone female genital mutilation, according to a new survey by Egypt’s Ministry of Health. While this number has declined from 97 percent since the last time statistics were released in 2000, it remains high, particularly since the practice was criminalized in 2008.” ([The New York Times](#))

### **May 15: Egyptian presenter Reem Maged's new TV show suspended**

“A show about women's issues presented by Egyptian journalist Reem Maged has been suspended by its broadcaster after only two episodes, the channel's head has said. The reasons for halting Gamea Moanas Salem (‘Feminine Plural’), which was broadcast on Egyptian satellite channel ONTV, were not given by channel head Albert Shafiq in his statement about the suspension.” ([Ahram Online](#))

### **May 19: Egyptian authorities using sexual violence on 'massive scale'**

“Egyptian security forces are using sexual violence against detainees on a massive scale, according to the International Federation for Human Rights. A report by the organisation suggests men, women and children are being abused ‘to eliminate public protest.’” ([BBC News](#))

## **Iran**

### **May 5: Leading Activist Arrested Ahead of Her Trial**

“Civil rights activist and Deputy Director of the banned Defenders of Human Rights Center, Narges Mohammadi, was arrested at her home in Tehran in the early hours of May 5, 2015. The reasons for Ms. Mohammadi’s arrest are not clear. She had appeared before Branch 15 of Tehran Revolutionary Court under Judge Salavati on May 3, following her summons, and was granted an extension so that her lawyers could review her case file prior to trial on new charges for her civil activities.” ([International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran](#))

### **May 7: Riot Erupts in Iran's Kurdish Capital Over Woman's Death**

“Furious over the unexplained death of Farinaz Khosravani, a chambermaid, ethnic Kurds in an Iranian provincial capital rioted on Thursday, May 7 apparently setting the fire that roared through the hotel where she had worked. Police officers used tear gas to disperse the crowds, according to news accounts, witnesses, and images posted on social media. The protesters suspected foul play in Ms. Khosravani's death.” ([The New York Times](#))

### **May 15: Women Living Alone: A Threat to Society? (Op-ed by Mansoureh Farahani)**

“Mitra, a 41-year-old divorcee from Tehran, is quick to point out the hardships of living alone. ‘As a woman, you face a lot of problems in society, including not being able to rent a home easily. Most landlords don't rent their properties to single women. The majority of estate agents reject you from the outset.’ Mitra separated from her husband nine years ago. But, after two years of living on her own, she found that society's disapproval was too much for her to handle.” ([IranWire](#))

## **Iraq**

### **May 8: Woman pleads for death to escape 30 times rape**

“In a harrowing interview with BBC World Service, Compassion4Kurdistan activists raising awareness of IS' persecution of women revealed that Kurdish fighters took a phone call from the unidentified woman. The peshmerga told the British-based activists that the woman was sobbing as she described her plight and debilitating injuries on the phone. ‘If you know where we are please bomb us... There is no life after this. I'm going to kill myself anyway – others have killed themselves this morning,’ she was quoted as saying.” ([SpyGhana](#))

### **May 14: The Women of Iraq: What Women's Roles Look Like on the Ground (by Ambassador Catherine Russell, U.S. Ambassador at Large for Women's Global Issues)**

“When Huda answered ISIL's knock on the door, she found men outside her home. Toting guns, they asked her why her son was in school instead of fighting alongside them. Women also came to Huda's home in Mosul, Iraq on behalf of ISIL. They came to size up her 10-year-old daughter for ‘marriage’ to ISIL soldiers. As a widow, Huda felt she had increasingly fewer options to save her sons and daughter from ISIL's clutches. She decided to flee her home, selling everything to fund the dangerous trip from Iraq to Amman, Jordan, where I met her on a recent trip to both countries.” ([Huffington Post](#))

## **Israel**

### **May 6: Record number of religious women enlisted in Israeli army in 2014**

“The year 2014 set a new record in the drafting of Orthodox women graduates of the state religious school system into the Israel Defense Forces. The increase in numbers, by 13 percent over 2013, comes in the face of opposition by rabbis in the National Orthodox community, who generally encourage the community's young women to volunteer for national civilian service instead of the army.” ([Haaretz](#))

### **May 15: Ayelet Shaked, Israel's New Justice Minister, Shrugs Off Critics in Her Path**

“She has been called the Michele Bachmann of Israeli politics, and was belittled by a former minister as the most prominent politician ‘who could star in a calendar hanging in garages,’ prompting even ardent critics to rush to her defense. All that, in less than a week, garnered a this-too-shall-pass shrug from Ayelet Shaked, who was sworn in on Thursday, May 14 as Israel's justice minister — the most contentious appointment in a contentious new government. ([The New York Times](#))

## **Lebanon**

### **May 6: The rise of female entrepreneurs in Lebanon**

“The line between social and commercial entrepreneurship is blurring, Hala Fadel, a Lebanese entrepreneur, says, as everyone wants to create jobs. But with inadequate governments (Lebanon has been deadlocked without a president for almost a year), start-ups are stepping into the breach to address issues from recycling to traffic jams.” ([Financial Times](#))

## **Morocco**

### **May 16: Morocco King Eases Restrictions on Abortion for Incest, Rape**

“Moroccan King Mohammed VI has ordered that laws restricting abortion be loosened, allowing it in the case of rape, incest, danger to the mother's health or fetal malformation. Debate erupted in this North African kingdom earlier this year over reforming the penal code, which banned abortion except in cases of a threat to the mother's life. The king had his justice minister, religious affairs minister and the head of the state human rights organization study the issue.” ([AP via ABC News](#))

## **Palestinian Territories**

### **May 7: Islamic loans give Gaza's women chance to survive poverty**

“Women in the Gaza Strip face increasing economic pressure as poverty rates reach up to 38.8 percent — particularly after Israel's latest war — and unemployment rates climb to a staggering 47 percent. This situation has pushed many women to become the breadwinners of their families and to seek sources of funding to establish small and sustainable enterprises by obtaining Islamic loans.” ([Al-Monitor](#))

### **May 17: Pope Francis canonizes two Palestinian nuns**

“Pope Francis named two Palestinian women as saints on Sunday, May 17 in a ceremony in Saint Peter's Square just days after the Vatican formalised its de facto recognition of the State of Palestine. The canonisation of Sister Marie-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas, founder of the Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary of Jerusalem, and Maryam Baouardy, who founded a Carmelite convent in Bethlehem, was not directly connected with the Vatican's Wednesday, May 13 announcement of its recognition of a Palestinian state.” ([Reuters](#))

## **Qatar**

### **May 14: Qatari women win 2 out of 29 seats in municipal council vote**

“Women won two of the 29 seats up for grabs on Qatar's municipal council, the only directly elected body in the country. Election supervisory committee chairman Major General Ibrahim Majid al-Khulaifi announced the election winners on Thursday, May 14. He says nearly 70 percent of the more than 21,000 eligible voters cast ballots. One of the female winners, Sheikha Yousuf al-Jufairi, was the only woman to win in the last election in 2011.” ([The Washington Post](#))

## **Saudi Arabia**

### **May 7: Banned from driving, Saudi women turn to Uber and other ride-share apps**

“Hala Radwan, a recent business school graduate, found a job in the marketing department of a big international company. There was just one problem: How would she get to and from work in the only country that does not allow women to drive? The mass transit options are notoriously poor. The cost of hiring a chauffeur was prohibitive. And she didn't want to deal with the negative comments she would face if she tried to hail a cab in the conservative kingdom, where a woman using public transportation on her own is often seen as lacking morals.” ([LA Times](#))

**May 11: Saudi courts continue to deal with violent crimes involving women**

“The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Justice reported the rate of violent crimes perpetrated by women has sustained over 2015 so far in comparison to 2014, Al-Hayat reported. The courts reported a total of 278 Saudi women and 82 non-Saudi women were involved in cases of physical assault in 2015 in comparison to 564 in 2014.” ([Al Arabiya](#))

**Syria**

**May 9: Syria conflict: With the men away fighting, women take the mantle of community leaders in Lebanon's refugee camps**

“Across Lebanon and largely out of sight, thousands of Syrian women are taking up the mantle left behind by men who are fighting, have been killed or simply can’t find any work of their own. Out of necessity, the women have become leaders and protectors of their families, their communities and of other women.” ([The Independent](#))

**Tunisia**

**May 19: Tunisia's female politicians prepare to seize their chance in local polls**

“At a hotel in the desert city of Tozeur, 26-year-old pharmacist Mariem Bouattour is preparing to share the findings of a survey into women’s opinions on key challenges for the local government. Waiting to hear her is a small crowd of around 150 people, but the event is part of a much bigger drive to get Tunisian women into politics.” ([The Guardian](#))


**Yemen**

**May 14: VIDEO: Women and children rally for Houthis in Yemen**

“Dozens of women and children, supportive of Houthi fighters, take to the streets of Sanaa to protest against what they called Saudi aggression.” ([Reuters](#))

By Julia Craig Romano

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